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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [WI](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: 2008 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT SPARKS
DEBATE

REF: A. RABAT 0172
[1](#)B. RABAT 0065

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) The Moroccan and Western Sahara chapters of the 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices sparked high interest and comments ranging from favorable to deeply critical. The embassy rollout included multiple television and radio interviews by the Charge d'Affaires (CDA) and Embassy staff. The Foreign Ministry indicated that it did not agree with many parts of the report, but that when taken together with an embassy press release noting some of the progress made here, it was generally satisfied. Human rights activists were also satisfied with the reports' quality, although some criticized the report's lack of "academic rigor." Public and media reaction was mixed, featuring as much criticism of the United States' own human rights record as discussion of Morocco's. Sharply critical statements by the Minister of Justice and a Palace-affiliated newspaper may be a message to Moroccan civil society not to see the report as a signal to open broader criticism of the Government. Such public undermining could jeopardize our dialogue on the issue. Post recommends the Department leverage the debate currently raging over the reports in Morocco to push for additional progress in discussions with Moroccan officials in Washington. End summary.

Government Reaction

[1](#)2. (SBU) CDA Jackson and Acting Deputy Chief of Mission (A/DCM) Karp delivered French and English copies of the 2008 Morocco and Western Sahara Country Reports on Human Rights Practices to Minister of Foreign Affairs Taieb Fassi Fihri, his Chief of Staff Nassir Bourita, Director General for Arab and Islamic Affairs Mohamed Azaroual, and Americas Director Fouad Yazorgh at 6:00 pm on February 25 (Ref A). They expressed satisfaction with our productive dialogue on the issue and appreciation for our balancing the criticism in the report with statements recognizing the real progress Morocco had made. Abdelmounaim El Farouq, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Director of Humanitarian and Social Affairs (and the working-level point person on human rights issues) told PolOff that the report was "fair" and expressed gratitude for the collaborative relationship between the Government and the Embassy. Other working level officials at the

MFA expressed some displeasure at what they termed an "over focus" on police brutality cases.

A Very Public Launch

¶3. (SBU) Post organized substantial press engagement to roll-out the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, including multiple television and radio interviews by the CDA and PolOff, and a print media and television round-table with the CDA on the morning after the reports' release. The Moroccan press widely reported the Charge's key messages, which were balanced between praise for Morocco's efforts to improve its human rights record (such as conducting a transparent election in 2007), and reminders that Morocco still had substantial work to do in addressing impunity, freedom of expression and trafficking in persons.

¶4. (SBU) The print press widely interpreted the reports as harshly critical of Morocco's record over the past year, highlighting reports of police abuse, claims of torture and poor conditions in prisons, as well as corruption and impunity from prosecution, as indications that Morocco's human rights record left a lot to be desired. As one noted independent weekly commented, "When it comes to the worst, yes we can!" Interestingly, the local press focused much less (than expected) on the Western Sahara report's evaluation that Morocco's record in Western Sahara had improved markedly.

¶5. (SBU) Moroccan editorials on the reports have tended to stress that the USG's recent poor human rights record, suggesting Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and the Binyam rendition case, for example, disqualifies the U.S. from the right to judge the actions of others. Minister of Justice Abdelwahad Radi reflected this sentiment when he told the press, "Frankly, the Americans exaggerate; we should not forget that the United States is greatly criticized when it comes to human rights." Of particular note was an editorial that appeared in pro-palace daily Le Matin on March 5, which, in addition to calling into question the USG's moral authority, also alleged (without providing evidence) that the report was not substantiated by facts. (See block quote below.)

¶6. (SBU) The piece was unusual in that it broke with Le Matin's normally reserved tone. It is possible that its tone and substance came from the Palace as a message to Moroccan civil society not to see the report as carte blanche to criticize authorities. If generated by the Palace, the editorial undermines the spirit and intent of the formal bilateral human rights dialogue process (Ref B) and ignores the balanced and nuanced public statement that the Charge and other mission staff painstakingly crafted around the launch. In a subsequent conversation however, the MFA's Bourita told A/DCM that the GOM remained satisfied with the reports' balance and had no issue with its content. He said, "Le Matin is just a newspaper."

¶7. (U) Block quotes:

"Human Rights: The Umpteenth Report" editorial in pro-palace French-language daily Le Matin on March 5:

"A report, whatever its source or objective, is only a report. The one that the State Department has just, once again, published on human rights in Morocco, sins through an excessive approximation that no reasonable man would stand for. And it is not by accident that the Minister of Justice, Abdelwahad Radi, expressed his strong reservations about its partial and

erroneous content. The voice coming from abroad, stamped with the State Department seal or by European organizations, constantly finds favorable echoes in our country. Our proposal is not to disavow completely the content of this 'umpteenth' report of the U.S. State Department, which, to draw its conclusions, bases itself on a demarche, [which is at the very least], doubtful. Nobody in Morocco, and even less the officials concerned, can stand for such a report riddled with errors and [marked] by amateurism. Our country does not host a prison the style of Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, or Bagram. ... From 2001 to the arrival of Barack Obama at the White House, America had transfigured itself under the reign of George W. Bush and his consorts, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, at the lead."

Quote Continued: "Human Rights in Morocco are a subject undergoing rapid progress, a more positive than negative subject. Just like democracy, human rights are never completed; they are consubstantial to men and decision makers' political will. When human rights reach and cross a significant line, they never or rarely regress. In our country, human rights are neither better nor less good than in European or American democracies. Human rights proselytes in Morocco consider that Moroccan justice is corrupted and that it remains under influence! Trivial: which Government in the world has a 'perfectly perfect' justice, i.e. totally and according to Hegel, the words 'absolutely,' independent,' business, mafia, environment, embezzlement (including Madoff) give us cause for setbacks. They are not an exception to the rule, but the rule without exception. We will in no way approve, and even less tolerate, that a report, even produced by the U.S. State Department, may indict the foundations of our human rights policy and denigrate our national and international pride.

"American paradox," editorial by independent French-language daily Le Soir on February 27:

"What interest to accord to the most recent State Department report on the situation of human rights in

the world in general, and in Morocco in particular" Some years ago, this document was feared by all the totalitarian regimes [who] waited for its publication with much apprehension. This was before September 11. Today, can the America of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo still permit itself to evaluate whether the Arab and Islamic world respects human rights or not? The America that kidnapped Mustapha Hamdi, after 23 years of loyal service at the U.S. Consulate in Casablanca, when he arrived at JFK Airport in New York in April 2006, while he was chosen to go from the beginning for a training class of 10 days in Washington, this America, does it have the legitimacy to scold Morocco for the violent acts carried out by its security services or to titillate on the subject of the non-independence of its justice? Curious thing. The same report does not touch upon the case of Mohamed Binyam. The U.S. State Department has perhaps 'omitted' to mention the most abominable abuses done to this Briton of Ethiopian origin during 18 months spent at the Direction du Surveillance Territoriale (DST - Moroccan domestic intelligence agency) in Temara [in Morocco]. The Department of our 'friend' Hillary Clinton does not say that it is CIA agents who delegated to their Moroccan counterparts the dirty job of cutting the genitals of this poor young man with a razor. One cannot commit all these atrocities and come later to talk about human rights. George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Peale [sic] and all these 'children of Satan' have ended up creating a rupture of trust, even a break, that has been achieved today, between America and the currents of opinion that have been quite recently favorable to it in the

Islamic world. Will Obama's America be able to quickly turn this ignoble page of its history?"

The Public at Large

¶8. (SBU) Pro-independence human rights activist contacts in Western Sahara expressed a disappointment in seeing the situation in Western Sahara described as improved, but agreed that the number and type of abuses in the territory in 2008 undeniably decreased. They argued that harassment of Sahrawi activists in Morocco proper increased, a fact which was noted in both the Morocco report and the embassy's public statements. Embassy contacts in the political Berber movement were pleased with the Morocco report's expanded treatment of their issues.

¶9. (SBU) PolOff addressed a diverse group of approximately 50 graduate research students at the Moroccan Center for Strategic Studies (MCSS - a private, non-profit think tank) on March 2 as part of the Embassy's report release outreach. The group in general echoed broader media sentiments by asking what authority the United States Government (USG) had to criticize other nations. Others strongly criticized the report for not taking local values and cultural frameworks into account, particularly in relation to criticism of the King and Islam's role in society.

¶10. (SBU) Across the board, the students said that the report lacked academic rigor, a logical framework or research criteria, and encouraged the USG to apply exacting standards of proof and research. Interestingly, one speaker took PolOff to task for not also implicating Moroccan society in a slowdown of reform momentum saying, "We, as individuals, are responsible for taking and paying bribes and undermining the rule of law as well." The group agreed to undertake a class project to produce their own human rights reports on Morocco, Western Sahara and the United States in 2009 and send them to the Embassy.

Next Steps

¶11. (SBU) Post recommends that the Department use the following points in human rights in discussions with GOM officials:

-- Morocco remains a regional reform leader, as recognized in our 2008 Human Rights Report, but we are

concerned that reports of abuses in Western Sahara in 2009 have increased significantly in 2009.

-- Impunity remains a serious issue. As discussed in the dialogue between our Embassy in Rabat and your Government, we will be required to name abusers in the 2009 report if action is not taken.

-- Morocco needs to distinguish between human trafficking and smuggling.

-- Prison conditions do not meet international norms.

Comment

¶12. (SBU) Both the reports and Post's robust public engagement around their launch sparked a vigorous debate on the state and status of human rights in Morocco that continued for almost 10 days. It is a sign of the increasing importance of the issue here

that even the harshest criticism noted that Morocco still has progress to make and despite its best efforts, can still regress. We recommend that the Department leverage the momentum here by raising the above points at senior levels with Moroccan officials during their visits to Washington and in meetings elsewhere. Despite continued MFA expressions of satisfaction, if government mouthpieces continue to criticize and undermine the reports and the embassy's discussions with the GOM (Ref B), we may be obliged to rethink our formal human rights dialogue to provoke a reconsideration of tone and intent. End Comment.

Jackson